

First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa

# The Parkway Spire

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Deadline for next Spire submissions:  
August 15, 2024



## Letter from the Editor

After 5+ years, it's time to pass the torch! This is my last edition as editor of the Parkway Spire, and I would like to say a big THANK YOU to all who have submitted articles over the past 5 years, ensuring we've had lots of interesting content to share with the congregation and beyond. You have really stepped up, and it has been a pleasure to read and include your submissions here. And I hope you have all enjoyed sitting down and taking the time to read our quarterly seasonal magazine.

I would especially like to thank the Spire team - Jan who does a stellar job on the layout, and our proof-readers Susan, Andrew, and Jen. It always amazes me to see those keen eyes pick up on so many little errors or inconsistencies before each issue is published.

**With much gratitude for the opportunity to share in this publication,**

**Marg Lee, Editor**

## Caring Contacts

*"We respond to your phone calls and emails when you wish to alert us to a need or concern, or when you want to celebrate a joy"*

### The Caring Network

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## Facing Windows ~ Rev. Eric Meter



I had the movie on pause when I thought maybe I just needed a good cry.

The movie was Marie Clements' *Bones of Crows* from 2022. A friend had recommended it to me, and, if you haven't already seen it, I recommend it to you. It's the story of a Cree woman, of her time in a residential school, of her time serving in the Canadian forces during WWII and after, of her children, of legacy and the way our stories, and history, sometimes rhyme. And, yes, it may induce some tears.

I remembered a time, several years back during my teens and early 20s, when I didn't cry. To this day I recall not crying when learning of a younger family friend who was killed in an alcohol-fueled car crash. Melissa had piled in the back and there wasn't a seat belt for her. You can guess the rest. If I remember correctly, she was all of 14.

I do remember being with her when my grandfather Clarence was visiting. She asked him point blank, *Why is the skin on your hands so wrinkly?* While I was aghast, he answered her calmly, *That's what happens sometimes when you get to be my age. Here, you can touch the skin there.* And she did.

I learned something that day, about curiosity and being direct, and how what "rules" apply in various situations.

But I had been talking about a movie and my tearful reaction to it.

First, to movies in general. I've long loved them. In university I was part of the student film group which showed movies every Wednesday, Friday and Saturday night in one of the lecture

halls on campus. We billed it, with undergraduate humour, as *the most fun you can have in the dark with your pants on.*

We showed cult classics (watching *Eraserhead* two nights in a row was something I would never wish on anyone), renegade classics from a generation or two earlier (*Easy Rider* comes to mind) and documentaries (*The Times of Harvey Milk* has stayed with me ever since) and more (*Mary Poppins* was a HUGE hit).

And, of course, times and we change. I haven't been to a movie theatre since before COVID. And while I miss it, I'm not quite sure what film would draw me back.

Hmmm. I've been avoiding those tears, haven't I?

Truth is, there is much more than enough sadness to go around. We all (I'm certainly not alone in this) hear stories worthy of attention and tears almost, if not literally, every day. Recently I heard about a family trying valiantly to come to terms with their ten-year old son taking his own life. Ten!

Add that to the recent news of the latest car crash on the 417 or 401, news from the Middle East, Ukraine or next door and it's a wonder we're able to function at all.

And, for the most part, we do function, day in and day out. Most days, at least. Because every now and then it is completely within our rights to press pause and have a good, cleansing cry.

I remember what one of our friends at Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services told us on a Sunday morning some

months ago. Of an Indigenous elder who, recounting the residential school experiences of so many, commented that *There's not enough whiskey in the world to make that pain go away.*

I try to keep that in mind when I see anyone who looks down on their luck. What pains are they carrying? We all have them.

And then I remember that I had pressed pause on the movie. What a privilege to be able to do so. While the story was fiction, *Bones of Crows* was based on the experiences of thousands of families over decades. We can only try to press pause on life. And it never works for any length of time.

You may have heard me say before that during seminary I heard someone deeply involved in Liberation Theology efforts in Central America admit that all those efforts were not enough. What they needed first, it seemed in hindsight, was a Theology of Tears.

Before there can be healing, the tears need to flow.

So, if it takes a tear-jerker of a love story, tragedy, or other movie, have at it. Let yourself have a good cry now and then. We all deserve it. Especially if it helps us keep in mind what so many carry on their shoulders and in their hearts, day in and day out.

If we take Reconciliation at all seriously, what better place to begin? And it is only a beginning. The next steps are taken with others, when we share what brings us to tears. The journey continues from there.

*In shared faith,*

*~ Rev. Eric*



# Religious Exploration - RE-flections ~ Jodi McIntosh



## Interview with Jetpig

**Jodi:** Welcome, Jetpig! It's a delight to be having this conversation with you today. Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

**Jetpig:** Thanks for having me! I'm Jetpig, your friendly neighborhood ambassador for the UU values. I zoom around in my trusty jetpack, powered by love, spreading the message of justice, equity, pluralism, interdependence, generosity, and of course, love itself!



**Jodi:** That jetpack is quite the conversation starter!

**Jetpig:** (Snorts happily) It is, isn't it? The heart represents the love that fuels all the UU values. And the backpack part? Well, that's where I keep my secret weapon, little seeds for each of the values that I want to spread! I want to sow as many seeds as I can in the garden of people's hearts.

**Jodi:** That's a beautiful metaphor. We heard you've been getting involved in church activities. Tell us about your experiences!

**Jetpig:** Absolutely! I recently joined the Mystery Pal breakfast, which was a blast! Meeting new people and spreading the UU spirit, that's what I'm all about. Plus, I gotta say, those muffins were out of this world. I've also been dropping in each Sunday to share my message about each value. So far, we have taken a deep dive into the values of Justice, Equity and Transformation. Each week we plant a new seed in our value garden and in the hearts of all who are there.



**Jodi:** That's wonderful! The children in our congregation seem to absolutely adore you. They've been drawing pictures and learning all about the UU values from you. How has it been interacting with them?

**Jetpig:** (Eyes light up) Oh, the kiddos! They bring me so much joy! Their enthusiasm is contagious. Seeing them all excited about the UU values, drawing pictures of me with my jetpack – well, that just melts my little piggy heart. It reminds me why I do what I do. They're the future, you know, and planting those seeds of love and justice early is so important!



**Jodi:** That's a wonderful sentiment, Jetpig. Is there anything you'd like to say to our congregation?

**Jetpig:** Together, let's cultivate a garden of love, justice, and all the wonderful UU values! Remember, everyone is welcome in the UU faith, and there's always room for more love. So, keep your hearts open, spread kindness, and let's all zoom towards a brighter future, together!

~ submitted by Jodi McIntosh  
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# Musical Interludes ~ Jenn Berntson



It's been a great season of singing at FirstU! Since January, we've been doing singalong preludes with the congregation, with the aim of learning some new songs from outside our hymnals, getting more people singing, and starting off the service on an exciting note. We've welcomed new members to all three choirs this term, as well as pianists Shawn Potter and Caleigh Aalders to rehearsals and performances.

The 2023-24 choral season has drawn to a close! Our spring concert "Love Call Me Home" was well attended and very well received. We were delighted to host the FirstU House Band at the

concert, and they performed two numbers, including one with Chalice Choir. Thank you to our audience for their support and positivity, to our volunteers for their help, and to the performers for their energy, hard work, and musicianship. We sadly had to cancel a performance at Unitarian House due to illness, but we hope to be back soon!

Summer Choir will be running every Sunday in July; you can show up at 9:45 a.m. and learn a song to sing in that service. This is a great opportunity to try out choir if you're interested, or if you can't commit to the regular, weekly rehearsal schedule during the year. We will also be providing

music for two memorials in August. For more information you can contact:

[music@firstunitarianottawa.ca](mailto:music@firstunitarianottawa.ca).

The House Band will also be performing on June 30, and August 11.

For more information contact: [houseband@firstunitarianottawa.ca](mailto:houseband@firstunitarianottawa.ca).

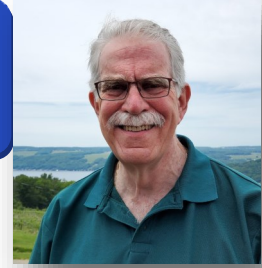
It's been wonderful to be back at FirstU and to be making music with all of you again!

*With song,  
~ Jenn*

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## Splinters from the Board ~ Chuck Shields



This is my first ‘Splinters’ column since becoming president at FirstU’s AGM in early May. I appreciate the confidence that members of the congregation have expressed in me and look forward to working with the board, staff and our many committees, teams and volunteers to move the congregation forward as we work to kindle our lights.

First, though, I want to say a big ‘thanks’ to Brent Nicolle, who has served as the FirstU President for the past two years and in other leadership roles for several years before. Fortunately, he is continuing to serve as past-president for the next year so I and the board will continue to have his input. He has also promised not to go far from other congregational involvements.

It has struck me that since September, and certainly since January, we in the congregation are beginning to find our footing

following the upheaval of COVID and all the changes over the past few years. From January to May, we have welcomed new members each month, for a total of 13 so far. We will be welcoming them officially into the congregation as part of the June 2 service. Some have already stepped into significant leadership roles, as Catherine Pope has done in taking responsibility as director of our beloved Fall Fair.

Attendance at Sunday services has regularly been over 100, which is in the range of pre-COVID times. In addition, there are another 50-100 who regularly access the services via our YouTube channel. Those of us present on Sundays have enjoyed the familiar, enthusiastic buzz before the service begins and the friendly and energetic conversations during Hospitality Hour, where we regularly welcome newcomers.

In addition, there have been many groups, including several musical events such as the Ottawa Grassroots Festival, that are taking advantage of our space. We held a full Fall Fair last November and are looking forward to another this year. The Ajashki Program has continued to blossom, having grown to embrace art and social enterprise.

This promises to be an exciting and positive year. I’m looking forward to our accomplishments continuing with initiatives like our campus redevelopment, which promises to help us address our principles and sustainability. Also, our commitment to Creating Compassionate Community will continue our focus on being welcoming to those already part of the FirstU community and to those who are finding us. I look forward to walking with you on this journey.

~ submitted by Chuck Shields  
[president@firstunitarianottawa.ca](mailto:president@firstunitarianottawa.ca)



## What Does Working Here Give You, Beyond a Paycheque?

This was a thought-provoking question posed by Rev Eric and discussed at a recent staff meeting.

We agreed that as a team, we support one another, share laughter during light moments, and tackle challenges together. We are not afraid of having difficult conversations when necessary.

Being taken seriously is indeed crucial in any professional setting. It fosters a sense of respect, trust, and collaboration among our team. Since we value each other's opinions and contributions, it creates a positive work environment where everyone feels heard and appreciated. This influences our wellbeing as a team.

It's truly liberating to be allowed to be our authentic selves and find joy in the diverse tasks that come our way. The combination of flexibility, autonomy, and a range of responsibilities creates an environment where each day brings new opportunities.

We also recognize a ministerial aspect to our responsibilities, regardless of individual positions. This acknowledgment highlights a shared commitment to serving a higher purpose or mission. Whether it's being compassionate listeners, sharing congratulations or sympathy,

or even giving a hug, this ministerial perspective fosters a sense of purpose and dedication within the team that is very rewarding.

We agreed that we enjoy our work at FirstU!

### Your FirstU Ottawa Team:

- ♥ Reverend Eric Meter, Lead Minister (2.5 years)
- ♥ Jodi McIntosh, Director of Religious Exploration (1 year)
- ♥ Susan McEwen, Religious Education Assistant (6 months)
- ♥ Jenn Berntson, Director of Music (2 years)
- ♥ Dee Mollema, Lead Custodian (2 years)
- ♥ Eden Bigras, Custodian (1 year)
- ♥ Julia Defalco, AV Coordinator AND Custodian (2 years)
- ♥ Allison Armstrong, Communications Coordinator (3 years)
- ♥ Michelle Jackson, Finance AND Human Resources Manager (10 years)
- ♥ Jen Brennan, Operations Manager (15.5 years)

~ Submitted by Jen Brennan

"FOR ME THE HIGHLIGHT OF WORKING AT FIRSTU OTTAWA IS GETTING TO MEET AND SPEND TIME WITH SO MANY DIFFERENT PEOPLE, AND BEING A PART OF A CARING COMMUNITY. I LOOK FORWARD TO COMING IN EACH DAY KNOWING THAT I WILL HAVE A CHANCE TO CONNECT WITH PEOPLE AT SOME POINT IN THE DAY. AND I FEEL LIKE THE WORK I DO IS REALLY APPRECIATED, AND THAT IT SERVES A LARGER PURPOSE."

-JENN BERNTSON,  
MUSIC DIRECTOR

## Parkway Spire Mandate (revised May, 2024)

The Spire, published quarterly in **March, June, September** and **December**, is a seasonal newsletter for members wishing to express themselves through respectful sharing of information of an editorial nature. Individual viewpoints, personal pieces of prose or poetry, and articles relating to the congregation (**450 words max.**) or a longer Feature Article (**900 words max.**), should be sent for consideration to [spire@firstunitarianottawa.ca](mailto:spire@firstunitarianottawa.ca) by the 15th of the month prior to publication. All articles are edited for content and grammar. Photos are also welcome (jpeg format), as long as permission has been received for photos that include recognizable faces.

Submission deadline for the fall edition is **August 15**.

**Announcements are no longer accepted in the Spire -- they should be sent to the eUU at [publications@firstunitarianottawa.ca](mailto:publications@firstunitarianottawa.ca).**

## Reclaiming Power and Place



When we were hanging up our collection of donated red dresses several puzzled visitors walking through the gardens wanted to understand the reason for this eye-catching display. It was easy enough to explain that the May 5<sup>th</sup> Red Dress Day is a National Day of Awareness of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and Two-Spirit People (MMIWG2S). It began in 2010 when Métis artist Jamie Black hung empty red dresses as a powerful symbol of the toll of gender-based violence disproportionately impacting Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit persons across Canada. Although Indigenous women make up less than 5% of the Canadian population, they account for more than 24% of female victims of homicide. The artist chose the colour red because it not only represents vitality and violence but also because it is the colour the spirits can see.

A more profound comprehension of the subject of MMIWG2S comes from a review of **Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls**. One of the Calls for Action from the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was the creation of a public inquiry to address the excessive violence toward Indigenous women and girls.

Consequently, The Inquiry was established in 2016 with a mandate to examine and report on the crisis of violence, including underlying social, economic, cultural, institutional, and historical causes.

Over the course of two years The Inquiry conducted hearings across the country with close to 2,400 participants in the truth gathering process that included family members and victims of violence, elders, knowledge keepers and experts, with an additional 750 written comments. The Final Report was released in 2019.



The Inquiry found that while the destructive effects of colonization - loss of land, forced relocation, residential schools, breakdown of family units, and the passage and enforcement of the Indian Act - impacts all Indigenous peoples in Canada, it affects Indigenous women in distinct and gendered ways: the tying of Indigenous female identity to her husband through the Indian Act, in challenging traditional Indigenous female leadership and Indigenous notions of gender, and in creating the stereotype of Indigenous female promiscuousness. Indigenous social and economic marginalization are experienced at higher rates by women, girls, and two-spirit persons. Indigenous women experience racist discrimination

in the health care, child welfare, justice and police, and education systems. And denying the ability, knowledge and agency of Indigenous women to have a meaningful voice perpetuates the violence against them.

In total The Inquiry made 231 Calls for Justice designed to protect, end violence, and promote equality of Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people. These are included in the recognition of the Right to Culture, Right to Security, Right to Health, Right to Justice.

You can read the complete Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls ( or the summary excerpts) on the following site: <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/>

~ submitted by Susan Mellor



Photo credits: Maryan O'Hagan

## Environmental Action Group (EAG)



### The Enduring Legacy of Plastic and Hope

I love the beauty that Spring brings. This colourful awakening of a new beginning. Unfortunately, it also reveals the trash littering the ground, most of it plastic. Some entangled in tree branches, just when they are starting to leaf.

This got me thinking about the prevalence of plastic. How it is everywhere in our life, in most of what we buy, overflowing our recycle bins, embedded in our landfills, creating a plastic “island” in our ocean, in our food and now microplastics in our bodies. How do we disentangle from its harmful side-effects while appreciating its benefits? Can the two co-exist?

We diligently recycle but *is* it having an impact? As more new plastic is produced it is difficult to see how we are getting ahead of the game.

In an [interview](#) with Peter Myers, founder and chief scientist at the not-for-profit Environmental Health Sciences, and adjunct professor of chemistry at Carnegie Mellon University, he stated that in the process of recycling, toxics are amplified, and that recycling is ineffective because it cannot go to scale. Feeling good about recycling lures us into continuing our same practices of consumption therefore never addressing the issue of reducing.

Recycling will still need to be counted in the game until new products are available. It would be better if more plastic items currently produced could be recycled through municipal programs and even better yet if more financial investment were available to start-up innovations.

TerraCycle

([www.terracyclefoundation.org](http://www.terracyclefoundation.org))

collects hard-to-recycle items through their Zero Waste Boxes, available for individual purchase. They also have corporate partnership opportunities to recycle anything, create products, shift to reusables, and integrate innovation. Free hard-to-recycle options are also available, where applicable. Within their foundation TerraCycle works with other countries to keep waste (most of it plastic) out of the waterways and oceans. (Read more on P. 7 of the [September 2023 Spire: Is TerraCycle the Answer...?](#))

Reducing the use of plastic is a big part of solving this issue, and it is within the industry sector to step up in a meaningful way. The explosion of online shopping has increased the amount of unrecyclable plastic. Plastic wrap is heavily used in the food industry to prevent spoilage, prolonging the life of foods that are travelling long distances.

Do I have hope? Absolutely! Change is already happening with less packaging around some of the products and foods we buy, through consumer demands, campaigns, and through the increased awareness of our purchasing power.

Now there is a push for a Global Treaty on Plastic Pollution. This makes me even more hopeful that we will all see the connections that led us into this mess, and that can lead us forward to resolving it.

Spring is such a hopeful time!

~ submitted by Susan Spence

### Meet Lomi!



My family has a long history of composting but in November, we moved into an apartment building and realized that we missed our ability to keep our food waste out of the garbage. After researching our options, including a worm composter, we decided to purchase the Lomi, an electronic composting device designed for people who live in apartments.

Lomi’s website states: “Food waste isn’t actually waste: it’s a valuable resource and the worst thing we can do is put our food scraps in a landfill where it contributes to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. One of the best things we can do is use food scraps, which is nature’s fertilizer, to regenerate the soil, grow healthy plants, and save GHG Emissions.”

The machine is the size of a bread machine (see photo) and runs with a faint humming noise. The bucket is dishwasher safe, and can be used to collect your scraps. It uses activated charcoal filters to prevent smells.



Continued on page 9...

## Environmental Action Group (EAG) cont...

How does it work? You can put many types of waste into the Lomi, including food and garden waste, coffee grounds and egg shells. I also decided to try putting in light cardboard scraps such as raisin boxes/toilet rolls, which I cut up. Once your bucket is full, and the lid secured, you press a button selecting which mode you want to use.



Lomi produces three types of “Lomi Earth”, depending on which mode you use. We decided to run our first load under “Econo Mode” and it took about 3 hours to create Lomi Earth which can be disposed of in your yard, garden or in the garbage. A second mode breaks down compostable plant-based plastics.

In “Grow Mode”, which takes about 16 hours, you can enhance the quality of the product by adding tablets which provide a unique and nutritious blend of microbes (bacteria and fungi) that work to accelerate and increase the amount of organic matter in Lomi Earth. Like a fertilizer, it is recommended to mix this into regular soil at a 1:10 ratio.

We used Grow Mode in week 2, and our finished product is about 5 cups of Lomi Earth; the finished product is brown, smells a bit smoky/sweet like coffee and I will try using it on some plants soon.



There is a lot of information on their website about sustainability. Lomi states that they are reducing each household’s carbon footprint; even though Lomi is powered by electricity, they claim that you reduce your carbon footprint by an average of 169kg CO2e every year. As well, I like the fact that Lomi accepts all of their machines back to refurbish and donate to schools for environmental education programs.

*~ submitted by Lisa Sharp*

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## In Memoriam

**Dorothy Alma Funke** (née Humphrey) ~ died 13 January 2024 (b. 20 December 1928), wife of Edgar (Ed) Funke (d. 2016); mother of Alice, Louise, John and Charlotte, grandmother of six, great grandmother of four.

**June Johnson** ~ died 29 February 2024 (b. 5 August 1921), wife of the late John Johnson (d. 2023) for 73 years; daughter Rae Johnson (pre-deceased), son Allan (Wendi), and grandmother of five. June and John were members of First Unitarian Congregation from 1962 until 1997 when they moved to the Fellowship.

**William (Bill) Lawrence Sprott** ~ died 1 March 2024 (age 94), husband of Ruth (Lamartine), father of Nancy, Carol, Jane, David and Peter.

**Donald (Don) Pascovich** ~ died 29 April 2024 (b. 31 July 1935), husband for 25 years of Susan Barker; father of son Jan and daughter Alexia, grandfather of Adriana.

**Maureen Tod (née Warren)** ~ 13 May 2024 (b.1928), wife of Charles Tod (predeceased), and mother of Cynthia, and Melanie (Dr. Don Brooks). Both Maureen and Charles were members and volunteers in the Congregation, with Charles President in the mid 80’s.

# Report on the Canadian Unitarian Council AGM

The Canadian Unitarian Council (CUC) Annual General Meeting (AGM) for 2024 took place on May 25. In a Facebook posting a few hours later, the CUC asked the question “How many Canadian UUs does it take to put on an online AGM?” The short answer is a lot. There were 126 participants, including 72 voting delegates. The numbers for FirstU were 6 delegates and at least 2 observers.

The meeting lasted about 4 hours with one 15-minute break near the middle. It included the usual “routine” business including various reports and election (by acclamation) of new Trustees for the CUC Board. One good new feature this year was a “song leader” to call us to order and do collective musical breaks.

Following adjournment of the formal part of the meeting, there was an installation of the new Board of Trustees and some additional announcements.

There were three items of business that took the most time and provoked the most discussion.

First, delegates approved a new Goal and five Strategic Priorities for the work of the CUC for the next two years. Last year’s version was very controversial and ended up

being tabled rather than adopted. One novelty this year was only having a single Goal. There was a friendly amendment to this Goal before approval, that, in addition to identifying “new ways to build a dynamic and sustainable Canadian Unitarian Universalism”, we will build on what is already working to achieve this (see box below).



Second, after considerable discussion and with some opposition, delegates approved a motion from Vancouver Unitarians “encouraging” the CUC and its member congregations (FirstU is one) to divest from the big five Canadian banks, including moving accounts to other financial institutions such as credit unions, as a way of further defunding fossil fuels. This is something we can also consider doing as individuals.

Third, there were the financial agenda items, including approval of an updated CUC budget for 2024 and preliminary budget for 2025. The CUC has had significant deficits in its Operating Fund for the last several years, resulting in large transfers out of its investments to make up the difference. This situation has some similarities to FirstU’s financial situation. It makes it very challenging for the CUC to implement the above divestment recommendation anytime soon. The CUC’s Operating deficits are forecast to continue in 2024 and 2025.

If you enjoy financial challenges, the CUC is still looking for a volunteer to be its new Treasurer. A description of the role and responsibilities is available at: <https://cuc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/CUC-Treasurer-Description-2024-03.pdf>

Our UU Connections Team (email [uuconnections@firstunitarianottawa.ca](mailto:uuconnections@firstunitarianottawa.ca)) will continue to provide periodic updates about what is happening at the CUC and how our FirstU congregation can participate.

*~ submitted by Maury Prevost with input from other CUC AGM participants*

## CUC Goal

Work together to enhance and strengthen existing successful approaches and to identify new ways to build a dynamic and sustainable Canadian Unitarian Universalism that serves our Unitarian Universalist and wider communities, grounded in our 8 Principles.

## Strategic Priorities

- Communicate with people to understand where the energy, need and opportunities are;
- Strengthen collaboration among the CUC Board and Staff, UU Ministers of Canada, religious professionals, and UU congregations and communities;
- Rework the CUC’s internal systems and programming, to dismantle racism and systemic barriers to full inclusion;
- Implement additional revenue streams to ensure we are thriving;
- Enhance content and resources that expand engagement and empower our congregations and communities to serve the wider world.



# First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa

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